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ABSTRACT

Some principles, assumptions, and teaching techniques related to inservice education are presented in this paper for teacher educators who work with teachers or caregivers, Child Development Associate graduates or prospective teachers. The following principles for the selection of interactional focus are identified and discussed: (1) the teacher's understanding of her own situation; (2) strengthening (the teachers) worthwhile dispositions; (3) teacher competencies already acquired; (4) building long term relationships; and (5) providing moderate amounts of inspiration. General techniques for working with teachers are described under the following headings: (1) maintain an optimal distance between yourself and the teachers you are working with; (2) cultivate the habit of suspending judgment on what you observe; (3) phrase suggestions in experimental form; (4) avoid the temptation to stop a pattern behavior; (5) help the teacher to re-define her job so that it is achievable; (6) act as a neutralizer of conflicts; (7) use demonstrations of your own skills cautiously; (8) share your understanding of how a teacher sees you; and (9) resist the temptation to "use" teachers to get to the children. Concluding comments suggest useful assumptions for teachers. (SE)

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HELPING OTHERS LEARN TO TEACH: SOME PRINCIPLES AND TECHNIQUES FOR INSERVICE EDUCATORS

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HELPING OTHERS LEARN TO TEACH

Most programs for young children make provisions for the inservice education of staff members. Those of us engaged in helping others learn to teach may be directors of Head Start, day care or teachers' centers, CDA* field trainers, consultants, college instructors or curriculum coordinators. All of us confront similar situations, issues and problems and have similar choices to make.

The purpose of this paper is to present some principles, assumptions and techniques that might be useful for teacher educators whether working with inservice teachers or caregivers, CDAs or even prospective teachers. Often the person participating in inservice education is not in a traditional student role--working with an abstract or theoretical set of topics organized into formal lectures.

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*CDA is the acronym for Child Development Associate, the staff, training and credentialing program sponsored by the Administration for Children, Youth and Families, HEW.

Instead, the learner is an adult with strong involvement in the object of the interaction--namely, her** own teaching behavior.

Throughout this paper the term "principle" is used as defined by R. S. Peters (Peters, 1970) to mean that which makes a consideration relevant. Principles are not ironclad, fail-safe rules to be applied mindlessly, but are intended to guide practitioners, to be qualified by such phrases as "under some circumstances" or "as the situation warrants". Although these phrases are not repeatedly mentioned below, each principle outlined in the discussion that follows should be considered with appropriate qualifiers in mind.

PRINCIPLES FOR THE SELECTION OF FOCUS

All of us who teach, at whatever level, have to face the fact that we cannot

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**The feminine gender is used to simplify sentence construction; the welcome presence of male staff members in early childhood education is hereby acknowledged.

offer our learners all the possible advice, suggestions, commentary, information or praise that might be helpful or instructive to them. When we work with people in any situation, we are constantly making choices concerning the nature of the interactions you are having. The potential contents of human relationships are so large and broad that some choices have to be made concerning which content is most relevant, appropriate and useful at any given time in any given situation. Similarly, there are probably more than a dozen right or effective ways to respond in any given situation and probably just as many ineffective ways. Since we cannot respond in all the ways that are possible, choices have to be made. Obviously many different factors affect those choices. Some choices are made out of a sense of history (e.g., this is how we have always done it). Others are chosen because it is thought that teachers either want or expect them, or will attend carefully to them. Some

choices reflect philosophical commitments. The principles outlined below are recommended for use when considering what content to focus on when interacting with teachers you want to help.

1. *Focus on the teacher's understandings of her own situation*

The term understandings is used here to refer to the teacher's ideas, thoughts, constructions, concepts, assumptions or schemata about such things as how children learn, what "works," how she affects her pupils, what she expects of herself, what others expect, her role, duties and so forth.

We suggest that the most useful course of action available to inservice educators may be to focus on helping teachers develop understandings that are more appropriate, more accurate, deeper and more fully differentiated than they had previously been (see Katz, 1977).

The rationale underlying this principle is that the focus on understandings helps the teacher acquire knowledge, ideas, insights or information she can keep and use after the inservice educator has left the scene. Directives, prescriptions, instructions or even orders might also address the problem the teacher is trying to cope with, but their value is likely to be of short duration. It seems reasonable to assume that modified understandings are more likely to help the teacher to generate new behaviors than prescriptions and directives. For example, a teacher complained that she had been unable to stop one of her kindergarteners from persistent hitting of several others in her class. When asked what approaches she had tried so far, she explained that she had already hit the boy as hard as she dared in order to "show him how much hitting hurts." In such a situation, the inservice educator might want to simply prohibit the teacher's hitting by citing a rule or regulation or

a philosophical position. However, the teacher's understanding of a kindergartener's ability to abstract from his own pain on being hit the importance of not hitting others seems inadequate. In this case, the teacher's understanding of the situation she is trying to cope with could be improved by suggesting to her that when adults hurt children (by hitting them) and provide a model of hurting others, they are unlikely to convince children not to do so.

Other aspects of the teacher's understanding of children's responses to censure and her knowledge of alternative ways of handling the disruptive behavior of children might also be addressed by the educator. While a directive might "change" the teacher's behavior in a particular incident, only modification of teachers' understandings is likely to have enduring value and can thus serve as a basis of action in subsequent similar situations.

An underlying presupposition here is that an inservice educator is someone who has more useful, appropriate, accurate or differentiated understandings than the teacher being helped. The tacit acknowledgment that such differences exist legitimizes the educator's authority to provide inservice training.

2. *Focus on strengthening worthwhile dispositions*

Widespread enthusiasm for performance-based teacher education, and for competency-based education in general, seems to be associated with the risk of underemphasizing the development of desirable dispositions in learners. We suggest that when deciding what responses to make to teachers it is reasonable to choose those which are likely to strengthen enduring dispositions thought to be related to effective teaching. Similarly, responses to teachers should focus on weakening those dispositions which might undermine effective teaching. By dispositions we mean relatively stable "habits

of mind" or tendencies to respond to one's experiences or to given situations in certain ways. Some examples of dispositions likely to be related to effective teaching include inventiveness or resourcefulness, patience (i.e., longer reaction times), friendliness, enthusiasm, etc. Some dispositions likely to undermine effective teaching include tendencies to be impetuous, unfriendly, hypercritical and so forth.

Two suppositions provide the rationale for this principle. First, as already suggested, it seems obvious that we cannot teach all the knowledge, skills, methods, techniques, etc. which are of potential use to teachers. This being the case, it seems advisable to teach teachers and caregivers in such a way as to strengthen their dispositions to go on learning, to be resourceful and to be inventive long after the inservice educator's work with them is over. Second, while we indeed want to help teachers with

specific skills and methods, it is important to do so without undermining their "self-helpful" dispositions. In short, we should guard against helping a teacher acquire competencies in a way that might strengthen or engender a disposition to be dependent, uninventive and/or helpless.

3. Focus on competencies already acquired

In our eagerness to be "change agents", we may overlook the possibility that the teachers we work with may already have the competencies appropriate for, or required of, a given situation. In such cases the focus should be on helping the teachers to use already available competencies more reliably, consistently, appropriately or confidently. For example, a kindergarten teacher might be sufficiently skilled at guiding a discussion with her pupils, but may vary too greatly in her performance from one occasion to the next. If so, she probably does not require a module

on discussion skills, but perhaps a fuller or better understanding of the causes of her own performance fluctuations, or assistance in becoming more alert to cues which cause her to perform in ways that--as the saying goes--she "knows better" than to do! She might be helped, at least temporarily, by the suggestion that she refrain from leading discussions except when classroom conditions are optimum for her. In that way the teacher may be able to consolidate and strengthen her mastery of a skill she already has before trying it out under less than optimum conditions. Similarly, teachers of young children are often exhorted to "listen" to the children. It is reasonable to assume that all teachers have such "listening" competencies in their repertoires, although they may employ

them inappropriately and/or inconsistently.

In yet another case a teacher may have the skills required in a situation but fail to use them with sufficient confidence to be effective. For example, if the teacher's actions betray a lack of confidence when she is setting limits, or redirecting or stopping disruptive behavior, children may perceive mixed signals, challenge her and thus exacerbate the situation. In such cases the inservice educator's role becomes one of "shaping" and/or supporting the teacher's efforts to practice and strengthen already available behavior, rather than focusing on the acquisition of new competencies.

4. Focus on building long term relationships

This principle refers to those situations in which an observation of a teacher prompts us to offer "corrections". Sometimes, in our eagerness to be helpful and to establish our

own credibility, corrections are offered too hastily. Although in certain situations it may be appropriate to make corrections, there is often the risk of losing the opportunity to go on helping that teacher over a longer period of time by alienating her through premature corrections.

5. *Focus on providing moderate amounts of inspiration*

Many of the teachers we are trying to help can cope admirably with the complex tasks and responsibilities they face. They may not require new techniques, packages, or gimmicks, although they may believe them necessary, but simply need occasional encouragement or renewals of courage to enable them to sustain their efforts and to maintain enough enthusiasm to keep working at an unglamorous and perhaps under-appreciated job. Excessive sapping of courage or enthusiasm, at times approaching depression

(i.e., believing one's efforts have no effects), is a potential cause of ineffectiveness, no matter how many competencies the teacher has. Such ineffectiveness may depress enthusiasm and courage even further, which, in turn may again decrease effectiveness, starting a downward spiral. The inservice educator may be able to intervene in the downward spiral by providing moderate inspiration, encouragement and support.

It seems important that the inspirational message be specifically related to the work setting and its specific characteristics rather than a generalized message of good will. It is also suggested that supportive and encouraging messages contain real and useful information about the significance of the teacher's efforts. For example, it is likely to be more useful to say something like "those new activities really seemed to intrigue the older girls in your class..." than to say "you're doing great". Furthermore, it may be wise to provide inspiration in optimum rather than maximum amounts so that

teachers do not become "hooked" or dependent on it, thus undermining their dispositions to be self-helpful in the long run.

GENERAL TECHNIQUES FOR WORKING WITH TEACHERS

The principles outlined above are intended as overall guides or decision-making rules for inservice educators to help us select responses to inservice teaching situations. The general techniques described briefly below are intended to help the inservice educator to further the goals implied by those principles.

1. *Maintain an optimum distance between yourself and the teachers you are working with*

Many educators consider closeness, warmth and supportiveness essential and valuable attributes of their relationships with learners. Research seems to support the contention that warmth, for example,

is related to teacher effectiveness. However, we suggest that inservice educators may be tempted to make the error of being too close to their teachers. An optimum (rather than maximum) distance is recommended for several reasons. First, excessive closeness may inhibit or limit the teacher educator's ability to evaluate the teacher's progress realistically. Indeed, in such cases the teacher educator may be unable to help her to confront serious weaknesses, or may fail to perceive the weaknesses at all. Secondly, if the teacher educator becomes too close to the teacher he or she may unintentionally impinge on the teacher's right to privacy, a right which deserves protection. Thirdly, there is some danger that if we become too close to one of the teachers in the group we are working with, we might inadvertently make disparaging remarks about another in the set and thereby undermine our own credibility and effectiveness. Fourthly, if we allow ourselves

to become too close or involved with the teachers we are working with, we may find ourselves emotionally "burned out" in a few months (Maslach & Pines, 1977) and suffer not only personal stress, but also lose the ability to be effective on the job.

2. *Cultivate the habit of suspending judgment on what you observe*

There is a strong tendency among those of us who are teachers to pass judgment on what we see in the classroom. We tend to judge not only the rightness or goodness of what we see, but often to judge whether the teacher is doing things "our way" or not. Such assessments seem to come naturally! We recommend, however, that if the intention is to stimulate and support someone's development, then, instead of passing judgment, we ask ourselves such questions as:

How can I account for what I am observing? Why is the teacher responding to the situation in this way? Why is this happening? In seeking answers to such questions, rather than judging the events observed, we are much more likely to learn those things which will increase our capacity to help the teacher. We suggest practice in making up answers to the questions and guessing what the causes might be. Then the "guesses" can be inspected for plausibility. When a reasonably persuasive guess or answer has been formulated, than an appropriate method for helping the teacher observed can be selected and tried.

This technique is recommended for several reasons. First, it includes two features: it can help you to resist the temptation to pass judgment and will encourage you to inspect your observations more closely, which in turn can help to slow down your response to the situation, thereby reducing any tendency you

might have to over-react. Secondly, asking how the observed behavior might be accounted for is likely to lead to learning more about the people you are trying to help, and to increase your insight into how the teacher defines her situation. Obviously there are many reasons why teachers do what they do. Sometimes the teacher's reason for her action is that what she is doing appears to "work" (for her); perhaps what she is doing is all she knows how to do in a given situation. Often a teacher does what she does because she thinks that the director or the principal wants her to do it, even though that may not necessarily be the case. Some teachers do what they do because they think that the parents want them to do it, or the evaluators, or colleagues, or visitors...or their own teachers did these particular things, and so forth. Attempts to account for the observed behavior should help the inservice

educator to make more informed decisions about what to do next to help the teacher observed.

This technique is related to the more general principle of timing (Katz, 1977) which asserts that the longer the latency before a teacher responds to the learner, the more information the teacher has, and the more likely she is to make better decisions about the next steps. The latency issue seems especially relevant to inservice educators because they often enter classrooms "off the streets"--so to speak--without prior information concerning the antecedents of the situation observed. The temptation to pass judgment rapidly may lead to important errors in assessing teacher needs and competencies.

3. Phrase suggestions in experimental form

Most teaching involves occasions when the most appropriate response to the learner is to make a suggestion. When giving suggestions to teachers it is helpful to phrase them in

the form "Next time Y comes up, try X...and see if it helps". Depending on the situation, you might want to add something such as "X helps some teachers in this kind of situation...if you find it doesn't help, we can think about something else to try...".

This technique is recommended for several reasons. First, it can be expected to strengthen the teacher's disposition to be experimental, inventive and resourceful. Furthermore, when a suggestion is offered with the implication that it is the solution or the answer to the problem, and if subsequently the teacher's attempt to use it fails, her sense of frustration and defeat may be intensified rather than diminished. Similarly, it is advisable to make suggestions which the individual teacher can be expected to try

Successfully, or, if she fails, she should be able to understand why this was so. If suggestions require much greater sophistication than the teacher has, then she can only fail and intensify her sense of helplessness.

Another reason for recommending this technique is that when you make suggestions in terms of what to try "next time" you minimize the likelihood of humiliating or embarrassing the teacher over the incident just observed. Some inservice educators are so eager to get teachers to analyze their own "mistakes" following an unsuccessful teaching episode that they might inadvertently embarrass them, which in turn could undermine the teacher's disposition to go on learning, trying, inventing and seeking the best methods for themselves.

4. *Avoid the temptation to stop a pattern behavior.*

From time to time we observe teacher behavior which we think should be stopped "cold". We are not quarreling with the rightness of the teacher educator's position. However, we are recommending a two-step approach for such situations. First, we can ask in such situations whether the behavior observed really endangers any child. If the answer is a clear "yes," then we must use all the resources at our disposal to bring the behavior to a halt. If the answer is ambiguous ("maybe" or "no") then the next step is to help the teacher to try out and to practice alternative strategies with which to replace or supplant the old patterns.

If we succeed in stopping a teacher's behavior in advance of her sufficient mastery of a new pattern, she may be left

without alternative methods of coping with the situation, which may cause her children's behavior to become worse, and increase her own feelings of frustration and failure. Occasionally this sequence of events if followed by a type of "backlash" (i.e., a strengthened conviction that the old pattern was really the right one after all).

5. *Help the teacher to re-define her job so that it is achievable*

From time to time, inservice educators work with teachers who have defined their jobs so that they have to "do everything" in sight so that only a super-heroine could achieve the objectives. For example, many teachers of young children think their job requires them to "love all the children in their classroom." It is reasonable to assume that they do not have to love or even to like all the children they teach--they do have to respect them all.

The latter is not always easy, but is far more achievable than universal love!

The point is that when a teacher defines her job so that the potential for achievement (and therefore satisfaction) is very low, she is likely to experience decreases in responsiveness and sensitivity, which decreases her effectiveness, which in turn depresses satisfaction which further diminishes achievement and satisfaction. Thus a downward spiral seems inevitable. (Seligman, 1975).

In such cases, the inservice educator can assist the teacher by helping her to clarify her own purposes and settle on some boundaries for her responsibilities and her authority. Successful assistance along these lines should increase the teacher's sense of effectiveness, and satisfaction, which in turn should increase

her responsiveness and sensitivity, which in turn should lead to heightened effectiveness and satisfaction.

6. Act as a neutralizer of conflicts

Once in a while we find ourselves in a situation marked by intra-staff conflicts. In such situations we are often tempted to align ourselves with one side or the other. If we do give in to that temptation we may lose our effectiveness in the long run. The technique which seems useful on such occasions is to remind the complaining parties as gracefully as possible of their superordinate (and shared) objectives, to encourage them to keep their minds and energies focused on their long range common responsibilities. Similarly, it seems useful to resist the temptation to follow up rumors or in any other way to transfer potentially inflammatory information. It is also helpful to avoid reinforcing complaining behavior. One has to sort out

and select out which complaints are legitimate and deserve to be followed up, and which ones simply reflect the possibility that complaining is one of the ways some people know of getting others' attention.

7. *Use demonstrations of skills cautiously*

Modeling is a useful tool for inservice educators, and opportunities to demonstrate one's skills are often also opportunities to strengthen one's credibility as an educator. But modeling is not without some risks. For example, many inservice educators have had the experience of entering a day care center or preschool class in which (for whatever reason) the situation is out of control. Because we have worked with children for many years we may know how to bring order to the scene in a flash. In

addition, being a relative stranger may increase our power to obtain obedience. But such a demonstration of skill may cause some teachers to look at the scene and say to themselves "I'll never be that good" or "Why is it so easy for her/him?" and to become more discouraged and insecure. Or, in the case of demonstrating our skill with older children, occasionally there is a risk that the demonstration will make the teacher look incompetent in the eyes of her own pupils.

8. *Share your understanding of how a teacher sees you*

Keep in mind that we do not always know how the teachers we work with perceive us. We know that we are kind and warm and sincere and helpful, generous and giving, and so forth! But we are unlikely to always be perceived that way. Some teachers may be afraid of us, even though we don't

see ourselves as threatening in any way. If we sense that this kind of relationship is developing, it is helpful to let the teacher know that we understand this feeling, that we have also had experience with similar feelings, and that we realize teachers might look at us with apprehension, suspicion or even fear. Acknowledging the potential for such perceptions may be a technique by which to diffuse the excessive stress teachers sometimes experience when they are observed. Furthermore, the shared insight might clear the way to selecting more useful and constructive contents for the relationship between the teacher and the inservice educator.

9. *Resist the temptation to "use" teachers to get to the children*

Some inservice educators are especially intent on getting something accomplished

for the children, and seem to construe the situation as "getting to the kids through the teachers". If you want to help children (and no doubt you do), then do so directly. Try not to "use" teachers. Instead, focus on helping the teachers as persons worthy of your concern and caring in their own right. Try to define your role as someone who helps and work with teachers for their own sakes. When we do that whole-heartedly and well, the children they work with will stand to benefit, also.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In the course of employing the principles and techniques we have enumerated here, several assumptions might be useful. First, it seems useful to assume that not all teachers can be helped by any one teacher educator. Occasionally an assignment includes a teacher who constitutes a "chronic case" for a given teacher educator. Such a teacher drains large

portions of energy and somehow nothing really seems to help. While this teacher seems to be taking much time and thought and making no progress, there are other teachers we are responsible for who are waiting to respond to our help and to make developmental advances with relatively modest effort on our part.

We suggest that on such occasions it is a good idea to take the time to think through very deliberately whether or not we see any potential for growth under our guidance. If the assessment is ultimately a positive one, then we can make a "go" decision, and mobilize all the professional resources you have for the task at hand. If the assessment is ultimately negative, then we can make a "no-go" decision, and try to refer this teacher to other agents or sources of assistance.

The usefulness of the assumption that none of us can teach everyone

equally effectively resides mainly in the apparent effects of scrutinizing one's own thoughts and feelings about the case, and making a clear choice or decision. Once the go/no-go decision has been made, then the energy apparently drained in agonizing over the case seems to become available for your work with those teachers who are ready to respond to help. Indeed, the content of a relationship which is "chronic" and unsatisfying becomes focused on the pain and frustrations it engenders instead of upon the problems of improving the teacher's effectiveness. Furthermore, it appears that when a "go" decision has been made, we begin to notice some positive attributes of the teacher in question, which in turn tends to improve our responses to her, which in turn seems to lead to more positive responses on our part. Thus, a positive "snowball" can be set into motion by engaging in deliberate scrutiny of our own thinking about the difficult

or chronic cases we encounter.

Furthermore, it seems useful to always hold to the assumption that every teacher we work with has her own inner life of concerns and dreams and wishes and fantasies and hopes and associations, and so forth, just like all of us. We do not have to know the content of that life. It is not our business. But if we respect the fact that it is there, we are more likely to treat the teacher with dignity and with respect, which is not only essential in teaching, but also ethically correct.

Another assumption that seems useful is that every decision made when teaching contains its own potential errors. If we decide not to "correct" a teacher for the sake of building a long term relationship (as suggested above) we may make the error of letting the teacher continue to perform incorrectly. If we "correct" her immediately, we risk the error of undermining a

relationship which could stimulate significant long-term development impacting on a teacher's entire career. Similarly, if we demonstrate to a teacher our own skills in working with children, we may strengthen our credibility, but we may make the error of causing the teacher to feel ashamed or less confident of her own competence. On the other hand, if we pass by opportunities to demonstrate our skills, what we teach may be discounted as coming from an inadequate, high-minded and impractical or naive source, and therefore our ideas and suggestions may be dismissed out of hand.

Until such time as we can devise approaches and techniques that are error-free, we might accept the assumption that every choice or decision contains some errors; then we can think through what those errors might be and select the ones we prefer to make. This assumption should liberate us to make deliberate choices about the appropriate content of

our relationships to the teachers we work with, and to proceed with sufficient confidence to help them strengthen their own teaching abilities and self-confidence.

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